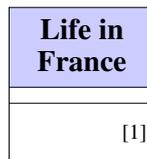


Education in France

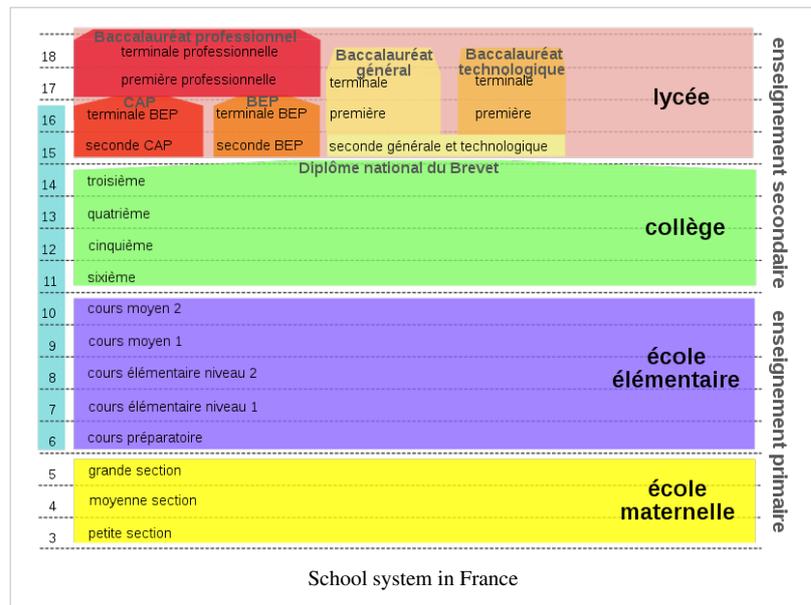


The **French educational system** is highly centralized, organized, and ramified. It is divided into three different stages:

- primary education (*enseignement primaire*);
- secondary education (*enseignement secondaire*);
- higher education (*enseignement supérieur*).

Primary and secondary education are predominantly public (private schools also exist, in particular a strong nationwide network of primary and secondary Catholic education).

Education has both public and private elements. The Programme for International Student Assessment, coordinated by the OECD, currently ranks France's education as the 25th best in the world, being neither significantly higher nor lower than the OECD average.^[2]



History



Jules Ferry

While the French trace the development of their educational system to Charlemagne, the modern era of French education begins at the end of the nineteenth century. Jules Ferry, a lawyer holding the office of Minister of Public Instruction in the 1880s, is widely credited for creating the modern Republican school (*l'école républicaine*) by requiring all children under the age of 15 -- boys and girls -- to attend. He also made public instruction mandatory, free of charge and secular (*laïque*). With these laws, known as Jules Ferry laws, and several others, the Third Republic repealed most of the Falloux Laws of 1850-1851, which gave an important role to the clergy.

	
Ministry of National Education	
Minister	Luc Chatel
Deputy Minister	
National education budget (2009)	
Budget:	€64.6 billion
General Details	
Primary Languages:	French
System Type:	Central
Literacy (2003)	
Total:	99 ¹
Male:	99
Female:	99
Enrollment	
Total:	15.0 million ²
Primary:	6.7 million
Secondary:	4.8 million
Post Secondary:	2.3 million ³
Attainment	
Secondary diploma	79.7%
Post-secondary diploma	27%
¹ As of 2004, literacy rates are no longer collected within INSEE censuses. ² Includes private education. ³ Includes universities, CPGE, and technical schools.	

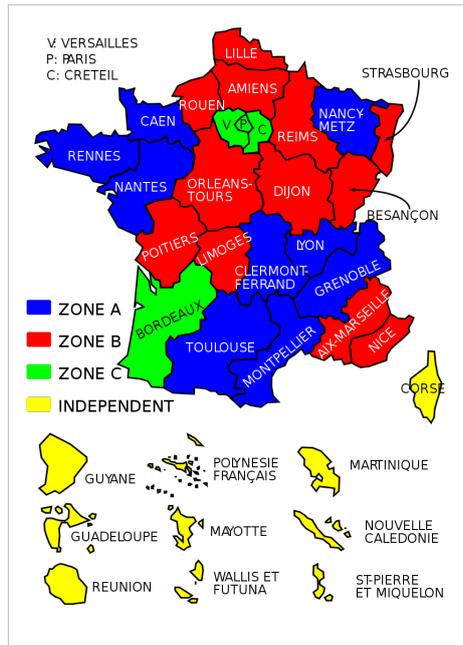
Governance

All educational programmes in France are regulated by the Ministry of National Education (officially called *Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche*). The head of the ministry is the Minister of National Education, one of the highest-ranking officials in the cabinet. As of September 2009, the Minister is Luc Chatel.

The teachers in public primary and secondary schools are all state civil servants, making the *ministère* the largest employer in the country. Professors and researchers in France's universities are also employed by the state.

At the primary and secondary levels, the curriculum is the same for all French students in any given grade, which includes public, semi-public and subsidised institutions. However, there exist specialised sections and a variety of options that students can choose. The reference for all French educators is the *Bulletin officiel de l'éducation nationale, de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche (B.O.)* which lists all current programmes and teaching directives. It is amended many times every year.

Find *B.O.* archives on the Ministry's official website ^[3]



Zone	Académies
A	Caen, Clermont-Ferrand, Grenoble, Lyon, Montpellier, Nancy-Metz, Nantes, Rennes, Toulouse
B	Aix-Marseille, Amiens, Besançon, Dijon, Lille, Limoges, Nice, Orléans-Tours, Poitiers, Reims, Rouen, Strasbourg
C	Bordeaux, Créteil, Paris, Versailles

In the Metropolitan territory, the school year extends from early-September to early-July. Most students have off Bastille Day, 14 July. The school calendar is standardized throughout the country, and is the sole domain of the ministry.

School year

For the 2005-2006 school year, the first day of classes across the country was 2 September 2005. The year ended on 4 July 2006.

In May schools need time to organise the exams (for example, the Baccalauréat).

In French overseas departments and territories, the school calendar is set by the local *recteur*.

Major holiday breaks are as follows:

- All Saints (*la Toussaint*), one and a half weeks around the end of October and the beginning of November;
- Christmas (*Noël*), two weeks around Christmas Day and New Year's Day;
- winter (*hiver*), two weeks starting in mid-February;
- spring (*printemps*) or Easter (*Pâques*), two weeks starting in mid-April;
- summer (*été*), two months starting in early-July.

Obtain the official school calendar ^[4] France is one of two non-PR states in Europe

Primary education

<i>Maternelle (Kindergarten)</i>		
Age	Grade	Abbreviation
3 -> 4	Petite section	PS
4 -> 5	Moyenne section	MS
5 -> 6	Grande section	GS
<i>École élémentaire (Primary school)</i>		
Age	Grade	Abbreviation
6 -> 7	Cours préparatoire	CP / 11ème
7 -> 8	Cours élémentaire première année	CE1 / 10ème
8 -> 9	Cours élémentaire deuxième année	CE2 / 9ème
9 -> 10	Cours moyen première année	CM1 / 8ème
10 -> 11	Cours moyen deuxième année	CM2 / 7ème

Schooling in France is mandatory as of age 6, the first year of primary school. Many parents start sending their children earlier though, around age 3 as nursery classes (*maternelle*) are usually affiliated to a borough's primary school. Some even start earlier at age 2 in *pré-maternelle* classes, which are essentially daycare centres. The last year of *maternelle*, *grande section* is an important step in the educational process as it is the year in which pupils are introduced to reading.

After nursery, the young students move on to primary school. It is in the first year (*cours préparatoire*) that they will learn to write and develop their reading skills. Much akin to other educational systems, French primary school students usually have a single teacher (or perhaps two) who teaches the complete curriculum, such as French, mathematics, science and humanities to name a few. Note that the French word for a teacher at the primary school level is *professeur* (previously called *instituteur*, or its feminine form *institutrice*).

Religious instruction is not supplied by public schools. *Laïcité* (secularism) is one of the main precepts of the French republic. Pupils therefore have civics courses to teach them about *la République*, its function, its organisation, and its famous motto *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity).

In a March 2004 ruling, the French government banned all "conspicuous religious symbols" from schools and other public institutions with the intent of preventing proselytisation and to foster a sense of tolerance among ethnic groups. Some religious and libertarian groups showed their opposition, saying the law hindered the freedom of religion as protected by the French constitution.

Secondary education

Collège (Junior High)		
Age	Grade	Abbreviation
11 -> 12	Sixième	6 ^e
12 -> 13	Cinquième	5 ^e
13 -> 14	Quatrième	4 ^e
14 -> 15	Troisième	3 ^e
Lycée (High school)		
Age	Grade	Abbreviation
15 -> 16	Seconde	2 ^{de}
16 -> 17	Première	1 ^e
17 -> 18	Terminale	Term or Tle

French secondary education is divided into two schools:

- the *collège* for the first four years directly following primary school;
- the *lycée* for the next three years.

The completion of secondary studies leads to the *baccalauréat*.

Brevet des collèges

The Brevet des collèges is the first official diploma a pupil has to sit. It is not required in order to enter *lycée*. Until 2006 the school marks for the whole of the third (4^{ème}) and final year (3^{ème}) were taken into account for a percentage of the mark. The rest of the mark consisted of the final exam, the brevet. Pupils were only tested on French, Mathematics and History/Geography/Citizenship for the exam.

Starting in 2007, only the marks from the final year (3^{ème}) were taken into consideration.

Baccalauréat

International educational scores (1995) (13-year-old's average score, TIMSS Trends in International Math and Science Study, 1995)					
Countries: (sample)	Global rank	Maths		Science	
		Score	Rank	Score	Rank
Singapore	1	643	1	607	1
Japan	2	605	3	571	3
South Korea	3	607	2	565	4
Czech Republic	4	564	6	574	2
Belgium (F)	5	565	5	550	11
Hong Kong	6	588	4	522	24
Bulgaria	7	540	11	565	5
Netherlands	8	541	9	560	6
Slovenia	9	541	10	560	7

Austria	10	539	12	558	8
Slovakia	11	547	7	544	13
Hungary	12	537	14	554	9
Australia	13	530	16	545	12
Russia	14	535	15	538	14
Switzerland	15	545	8	522	25
Ireland	16	527	17	538	15
Canada	17	527	18	531	18
England	18	506	25	552	10
Sweden	19	519	22	535	16
Thailand	20	522	20	525	21
Israel	21	522	21	524	23
Germany	22	509	23	531	19
France	23	538	13	498	28
United States	24	500	28	534	17
New Zealand	25	508	24	525	22
Norway	26	503	26	527	20
Belgium (W)	27	526	19	471	36
Denmark	28	502	27	478	34
Source: TIMSS data, in <i>The Economist</i> March 29th, 1997, p.25					

The *baccalauréat* (also known as *bac*) is the end-of-*lycée* diploma students sit for in order to enter university, a *classe préparatoire*, or professional life. It is generally taken at 18 if the pupil has not repeated a class during secondary school. The term *baccalauréat* refers to the diploma and the examinations themselves. It is comparable to English, Northern Irish, & Welsh A-Levels, American AP tests, the Irish Leaving Certificate, New South Wales's Higher School Certificate and the German Abitur.

Many students sit for the theory-oriented *baccalauréat général* which is divided into three streams of study, called *séries*. The *série scientifique* (S) is concerned with the natural sciences, physical sciences and mathematics, the *série économique et sociale* (ES) with economics, social sciences and mathematics, and the *série littéraire* (L) focuses on French, foreign languages, philosophy and the arts. However, these *séries* are not exactly specialisations and every *bac*-possessor has the right to enrol at any public university in the catchment area if this applies to the subject they wish to apply for. Students having followed the L series do not have enough scientific knowledge from their secondary education alone to succeed in science university courses, therefore some combinations of *baccalauréats* and university courses are very rare.

There is also the *baccalauréat technologique* and *baccalauréat professionnel*. The former mixes theoretical and vocational training and prepares students for professional higher studies, whereas the latter focuses on vocational training and prepares students for a direct entry into the marketplace.

Higher education

Higher education in France is divided between grandes écoles and public universities. Grandes écoles are selective whereas with universities, as long as you have a baccalaureat you can get in to one. This has led to an overwhelming amount of first year students, for example at the university of Montpellier, first year students have had to sit outside their lecture rooms and try to listen to lectures from steps stairs and corridors, unless they get there very early to bag the seats that are inside.^[5]

A striking trait of French higher education, compared with other countries, is the small size and multiplicity of establishments, each specialized in a more or less broad spectrum of areas. A middle-sized French city, such as Grenoble or Nancy, may have 2 or 3 universities (focused on science or sociological studies), and also a number of engineering and other specialized higher education establishments. In Paris and its suburbs there are 13 universities, none of which is specialized in one area or another, and a large number of smaller institutions which are highly specialised.

It is not uncommon for graduate teaching programmes (master's degrees, the course part of PhD programmes etc.) to be operated in common by several institutions, allowing the institutions to present a larger variety of courses.

In engineering schools, a large share of the teaching staff is often made up of non-permanent professors; instead, part-time professors are hired to teach one specific point only. These part-time professors are generally hired from neighbouring universities, research institutes, or industries.

Another original feature of the French higher education system is that a large share of the scientific research is not done by universities, but by research establishments such as CNRS or INSERM. In many cases, the research units of those establishments are installed inside universities (or other higher education establishments), and jointly operated by the research establishment and the university.

Tuition costs

Since higher education is funded by the state, the fees are very low; the tuition varies from 150€ to 700€ depending on the university and the different levels of education. (*licence, master, doctorate*). One can therefore get a Master's degree (in 5 years) for about 750-3,500€. Additionally, students from low-income families can apply for scholarships, paying nominal sums for tuition or textbooks, and can receive a monthly stipend of up to 450€/month.

The tuition in public engineering schools is comparable to universities, albeit a little higher (around 700€). However it can reach 7000€ a year for private engineering schools, and some business schools, which are all private or partially private, charge up to 8900€ a year.

Health insurance for students is free until the age of 21, so only the living costs and books expenses have to be added. After the age of 21 the health insurance for students costs around 150 € a year and cover most of the medical expenses.

Although this is the case in many schools, some public schools have other ways of gaining money. Some do not receive sufficient funds from the government to hold many trips, and so these schools may ask for a small (optional) entrance fee for new students.

Universities in France

The public universities in France are named after the big cities near which they are located, followed by a numeral if there are several. Paris, for example, has thirteen universities, labelled Paris I to XIII. Some of them are, however, not in Paris itself, but in the suburbs. In addition, most of the universities have taken a more informal name which is usually the one of a personality or a particular place. Sometimes, it is also a way to honor a famous alumnus, for example the science university in Strasbourg is known as "Université Louis Pasteur" while its official name is "Université Strasbourg I".

The French system is currently undergoing a reform, the Bologna process, which aims at creating European standards for university studies, most notably a similar time-frame everywhere, with three years devoted to the Bachelor's degree ("licence" in French), two for the Master's, and three for the doctorate. French universities have also adopted the ECTS credit system (for example, a licence is worth 180 credits). However the traditional curriculum based on end of semester examinations still remains in place in most universities. This double standard has added complexity to a system which also remains quite rigid. It is difficult to change a major during undergraduate studies without losing a semester or even a whole year. Students usually also have few course selection options once they enroll in a particular diploma.

France also hosts various branch colleges of foreign universities. These include Baruch College, the University of London Institute in Paris, Parsons Paris School of Art and Design and the American University in Paris.

Grandes écoles & CPGE

The *Grandes écoles* of France are higher education establishments. They are generally focused on a single subject area, such as engineering or business, have a moderate size, and are often quite selective in their admission of students. They are widely regarded as prestigious ^{[6] [7]}, and traditionally have produced most of France's scientists and executives.

The *classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles* (CPGE), widely known as *prépas*, is a prep course with the main goal of training students for enrollment in a *Grande École*; of which the best-known and most prestigious are Lycée Saint-Louis, Lycée Louis-Le-Grand, Lycée Henri IV, Lycée Hoche, Lycée Stanislas and Lycée privé Sainte-Geneviève^[8]. Admission to the CPGE is usually based on performance during the last two years of high school, called *Première* and *Terminale*. The CPGE programs are located within high schools but pertain to tertiary education, which means that each student must have successfully passed their *Baccalauréat* (or equivalent) to be admitted in CPGE. Each CPGE receives the files of hundreds of applicants worldwide every year during April and May, and selects its new students under its own criteria. A few CPGE programmes, mainly the private CPGEs (which account for 10% of CPGEs), also have an interview process or look at a student's involvement in the community.

The oldest CPGEs are the scientific ones, which can only be accessed by scientific Bacheliers. Scientific CPGE are called MPSI ("Mathematics, Physics and Engineering Science"), PCSI ("Physics, Chemistry, and Engineering Science") or PTSI ("Physics, Technology, and Engineering Science") in the first year, MP ("Mathematics and Physics"), PSI ("Physics and Engineering Science"), PC ("Physics and Chemistry") or PT ("Physics and Technology") in the second year.

First year CPGE students are called the 'Math Sup' - or *Hypotaupe* - (Sup for "Classe de Mathématiques Supérieures", superior in French, meaning post-high school), and second years 'Math Spé' - or *Taupe* - (Spés standing for "Classe de Mathématiques Spéciales", special in French). The students of these classes are called *Taupins*. Both the first and second year programmes include as much as sixteen hours of mathematics teaching per week, ten hours of physics, two hours of philosophy, two to four hours of (one or two) foreign languages teaching and two to three hours of minor options: either *SI*, Engineering Industrial Science or *Theoretical Computer Science* (including some programming using the Pascal or CaML programming languages, as a practical work). With this is added several hours of homework, which can rise as much as the official hours of class. A known joke among those students is that they are becoming monks for two years. Sometimes three.

The literary and humanities CPGEs have also their own nicknames, *Hypokhâgne* for the first year and *Khâgne* for the second year. The students are called the *khâgneux*. These classes prepare for schools such as the three Écoles Normales Supérieures, the Ecole des Chartes, and sometimes Sciences Po.

There are also CPGE which are focused on economics (who prepare the admission in business schools). These later are known as "Prépa EC" and are split in two parts ("prépa EC spe mathematics", generally for those who graduated the baccalauréat S and "prépa EC spe éco", for those who were in the economics section in the lycée.). The most

famous of those business schools are HEC Paris, ESSEC Business School and ESCP Europe which propose a Master degree and an MBA.

The students of CPGE are also matriculated in universities, and can rejoin college in case of failure of their *grandes écoles* ambitions or if they just do not wish to become engineers and feel not able to pass the *Écoles Normales Supérieures* competitive examinations. The ratio of students who failed to enter *grandes écoles* is low in the scientific and economics CPGE, but high in humanities, for the only *Grandes Écoles* aimed at in these classes are the *Écoles Normales Supérieures*.

The amount of work required of the students is exceptionally high. In addition to class time and homework, students spend several hours each week completing exams and 'colles' (very often written 'khôlles' to look like a Greek word, this way of writing being initially a *khâgneux* joke). The so called 'colles' are unique to French academic education in CPGEs. They consist of oral examinations twice a week, in maths, physics, French and the foreign languages, usually English and Spanish. Students, usually in groups of three, spend an hour facing a professor alone in a room, answering questions and solving problems. In CPGE littéraires (humanities), the system of 'colles' is different; they are taken every quarter in every subject. Students have one hour to prepare a short presentation that takes the form of a French-style *dissertation* (a methodologically codified essay, typically structured in 3 parts: thesis, counter-thesis, and synthesis) in history, philosophy, etc. on a given topic, and that of a *commentaire composé* (a methodologically codified commentary) in literature and foreign languages; as for the Ancient Greek or Latin, they involve a translation and a commentary. The student then has 20 minutes to present his work to the teacher, who ends the session by asking some questions on the presentation and on the corresponding topic. 'Colles' are regarded as extremely stressful, particularly due to the high standards expected by the teachers, and the subsequent harshness that may be directed at students who do not perform adequately, but they are important in as much as they prepare the students, from the very first year, to the oral part of the competitive examination, reserved to the happy few who successfully pass the written part.

Recruitment of teachers

Decades ago, primary teachers were educated in *Ecoles Normales* and secondary teachers recruited through the "Agrégation" examination. The situation has been diversified by the introduction in the 1950s of the CAPES examination for secondary teachers and in the 1990s by the institution of "Instituts Universitaires de Formation des Maîtres" (IUFM). University teachers are recruited by special commissions, and are divided between:

- "teachers-researchers" (enseignants-chercheurs), with at least a doctorate: they teach classes and conduct research in their field of expertise with a full tenure. They are either Maître de Conférences (Senior lecturers), or Professeurs (Professors). Only a Professor can be the director of studies for a PhD student. Net pay : from 2300 to 8800 euro (extra duties).
- Secondary school teachers who have been permanently "detached" from their original school position to teach in a university. They are not required to conduct any research but teach twice as many hours as the "teachers-researchers". They are called PRAG (professeurs agrégés) and PRCE (professeurs certifiés). Their weekly service is 15 or 18 hours. Net pay : from 1400 to 3900 euro.
- CPGE teachers are usually "agrégés" or "chaire sup", detached by the Inspection Générale, according to their qualifications and competitive exam rank, but not only. Their weekly service is about 9 hours a week, 25 or 33 weeks a year. Net pay : from 2000 to 7500 euro (extra hours)
- Primary school and kindergarten teachers (Professeurs des écoles), educated in "Instituts Universitaires de Formation des Maîtres" (IUFM), have usually a "licence" (Bac+3). Their weekly service is about 31 hours a week.

Statistics for education in France

The French Republic has 63 million inhabitants, living in the 22 regions of metropolitan France and four overseas departments (1.7 million). Despite the fact that the population is growing slightly (up 0.4% a year), the number and proportion of young people under 25 is falling. There are now fewer than 19 million young people in metropolitan France, or 32% of the total population, compared with 40% in the 1970s and 35% at the time of the 1990 census. France is seeing a slow aging of the population — less marked however than in other neighbouring countries (Germany and Italy), especially as the annual number of births is currently increasing slightly.

18 million pupils and students, i.e. a quarter of the population, are in the education system. Of these, over 2 million are in higher education.

In 1999, France's GDP was close to FF 9,000 billion (EUR 1,330 billion), i.e. FF 150,000 (EUR 22,000) per inhabitant. Of this total, just over FF 600 billion (EUR 95 billion) were devoted to initial or continuing education: 7.2% of GDP. As far as school education spending is concerned, France is in a middle position, behind the Nordic countries (Sweden and Denmark), but fairly significantly ahead of Italy and Japan.

See also

- Minister of National Education (France)
- Agence pour l'enseignement français à l'étranger
- Home Education in France
- University of London Institute in Paris

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